

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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JULY 24th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

The Prime Minister in his broadcast talk ten days ago included among the elements of strength in this country the fact that the Government is supported by a free Parliament and a free Press. It is the knowledge of what we owe to these institutions that sustains our people in the struggle in which we are engaged. But the public mind is more alive at present to the danger of their overthrow by the external foe than to the other danger of their being undermined from within through the real or supposed exigencies of war. Vigilance in maintaining freedom of speech and discussion, in so far as it is not contrary to the effective prosecution of the war, is a patriotic duty. It is a necessary consequence of a whole-hearted acceptance of our declared war aims. We are fighting the Nazi spirit and must resist its insidious as well as its violent manifestations.

TWO METHODS OF MAINTAINING MORALE

The Ministry of Information is fulfilling a necessary function in taking steps to discourage the spread of rumour and demoralising talk. This can do a lot of harm and needs to be kept in check.

These proper precautions may, however, have unintended results, unless it is realised that they are double-edged. Everything depends on maintaining the right balance. There are certain expressions of opinion that ought to be discouraged. But it would be a blow to the national morale to make this an excuse for repressing opinions which ought to find free expression. We can fight the war as a democratic people only if, within the limits set by military necessity, there is room both for free social intercourse and for vigorous and constructive thought. All tendencies to the black-out of mind lead to the decay of the higher creative qualities which are our greatest asset in the conflict with a ruthless tyranny.

One of the earlier advertisements of the Ministry of Information cannot be regarded as wholly happy. It contains the suggestion that in the last resort those who cause anxiety by spreading rumour or persistently say things that might help the enemy should be reported to the police. It is certainly the duty of patriotic citizens who come across instances of serious mischief-making to let the authorities know; and the activities described may call for such action. But there are dangers of another kind in the Government broadcasting a suggestion of this nature, in however guarded a form. Dr. Edward Thompson, in a letter to *The Times*, rightly drew attention to the risk that "a dull-minded minority and literal-minded minority will soon be bringing prosecutions for remarks they simply do not understand and never would understand." Nothing should be done to incite all and sundry to become common informers. There is no more detestable feature of the Nazi system.

The society for the sake of which the nation is willing to expend its blood and treasure is one in which men are able to trust one another. Traitors, of whom the Prime Minister said that he did not believe there are many, ought to be given short shrift. That needs to be done, however, without falling into the opposite danger of sowing seeds of mutual mistrust and suspicion in the minds of our people.

Imagine the situation that might arise in innumerable bar parlours—the centres of relaxation for millions of men and women for whom, after the intensified day's work in mills and factories, an evening of friendly social intercourse is more necessary than ever. They are told, and rightly, not to circulate rumours or facts of military interest. But the suggestion is conveyed that they must be careful not to express opinion. Even domestic gossip loses its flavour as people become conscious of the limits of conversation. The stranger is regarded with suspicion. A silence falls when he enters; even the habitués begin to regard each other with a calculating eye, and the conscious whisper becomes almost more dangerous than the open imprudence. The once cheerful company—and Britons could be cheerful under the least favourable conditions—retires behind its several pint pots, while the game of darts in which the incidental banter is so important an element, is conducted in a silence which robs it of its charm. This is not an atmosphere in which the spirit of victory tends to flourish.

I am permitted to quote some wise remarks which appeared a few weeks ago in another weekly letter called the *Sunfield Letter*. The writer says:—

“One of the most precious of all our national characteristics, and one from which Britain derives much strength, is the mutual trust and confidence which exists among the populace. Take the example which has now become almost a byword—the example of the British policeman, who has achieved the reputation of being a friend of the people rather than an official of whom one has to be afraid. Then there is the very high level of mutual co-operation among drivers on the road and a very fair degree of trust and confidence between retailers and public. This all belongs to the ‘inborn sense of freedom and respect for the individual’—a national heritage of which we can be justly proud.

“The tragedy is that this natural trust has been so consistently abused and betrayed by the school of Hitler that it is in danger of being destroyed altogether.

“Now imagine what it is like when you can trust no one—when you live in the continual fear that if you say anything that can possibly be construed as being derogatory to the national cause, you may be informed upon and betrayed by your nearest friend. You learn to look upon everyone as a potential spy or informer, you hardly dare to have any intimate friends, you keep your mouth shut, and the icy hand of fear keeps you separated from your fellow-beings. This fear destroys every individual point of view, and effectively breaks down any possibility of resistance on the part of the people.”

There are in fact two ways of maintaining the national morale. The one is the negative way of repression. That cannot be dispensed with, but it is a slippery slope down which we may quickly slide to misfortune. Suspicion breeds suspicion; restriction leads to more restriction. The other method is the positive and infinitely more promising one of telling the nation the truth and trusting to the fundamental sanity of the British people. They have a sure instinct in vital matters and are well able to distinguish between such liberties as we enjoy and the Nazi tyranny. We have a just cause; let us address our energies to making it juster and stronger. To stand unequivocally for human values and to prove our faith by our acts is the one sure means of holding the nation together and of multiplying our friends throughout the

world. That side will win the war, as one of our contemporaries has said, "whose cause inspires the most confident hope in human beings."

THE TREATMENT OF ALIENS

I have received a statement on the treatment of aliens which sets out some of the issues so clearly that I reproduce it practically in full. It begins by laying down two vital principles.

"(a) *Discrimination*.—Britain has friends and foes in every group of aliens within her shores. *Nationality is no guide to the loyalties of an alien in a conflict between principles rather than between peoples.* Whether or not aliens are interned, we must discriminate between our foes and our friends. The vital distinction is not between 'enemy' and 'friendly' aliens, but between suspect and non-suspect aliens of whatever nationality.

"(b) *Employment*.—All aliens from belligerent countries should be expected to work. Whether an alien is interned or not, the type of work and the conditions of employment should be determined, not by his nationality, but by our estimation of his reliability and capacities."

The statement goes on to examine some of the drawbacks of a policy of general internment.

"(a) *Political and Moral*.—The gain to national security achieved through the present throwing out of work of thousands of aliens is outweighed by the loss of morale which is likely to develop among our foreign population. Undue concentration on the 'Fifth Column' danger among aliens is leading to neglect of valuable opportunities of making use of the labour power and special abilities of the loyal majority.

"Present frustration of their eagerness to serve the country which has sheltered them—

(1) *May turn aliens into disgruntled 'Fifth-Columnists';*

(2) *Is being used by Goebbels to damage Britain's reputation in the eyes of the peoples of the Third Reich;*

(3) *Is influencing public opinion in the U.S.A. against us.*

"(b) *Economic and Financial*.—It is a waste of man-power and of public funds to maintain many thousands of aliens in idleness, either in internment camps, or on Public Assistance and the Assistance Board, or on the pay-rolls of officially subsidised refugee relief agencies. Most aliens now idle can and will do useful productive work if given the chance. We should benefit economically, politically and morally by using their services."

The statement then suggests three steps that ought to be taken:—

"(a) A public statement that the Government does not regard all foreigners as dangerous.

"(b) A public statement that the Government does intend to allow all non-suspect aliens, whether interned or not, to assist our war effort by their labour and their special abilities.

"(c) The setting up of an Aliens Board under a responsible Minister, with the functions

"(1) Of supervising all aliens and sorting out suspects and non-suspects ;

"(2) Of looking after the welfare of aliens and of organising their employment.

"(3) Of mobilising the brains and abilities of trustworthy aliens for the promotion of our war effort."

If it is necessary for military reasons to intern a large number of people, many of whom are admittedly innocent and in the fullest sense our friends, it is imperative that every possible step should be taken to mitigate hardships and to cause no needless suffering and anxiety. This applies especially to the breaking up of families.

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND INDUSTRIAL WELFARE

New opportunities of service are opening up as a result of steps that are being taken by the Minister of Labour and National Service to provide for the welfare of men, women and young people engaged in munitions and other war industries. The Minister has invited the co-operation of voluntary organisations and the Churches in the provision of welfare facilities outside the factory.

Acute problems of housing, feeding and recreation have already arisen from the large increase of industrial workers at points distant from their homes, and the need may be increased if enemy attack requires further transference of labour. There is also need for more day nurseries to care for the children of the growing number of married women who are employed in industry, either as wholtime workers or as part-time workers relieving juveniles two days in each week.

Divisional welfare officers are being appointed and local labour supply and welfare committees are being set up in the principal areas where war industries are being carried on. These committees will have the services of a chief welfare officer. They are being formed at present in about twenty centres and other centres will be added to the list.

It is hoped that the Churches may be able to supply premises and personal service in many of the desired directions and especially in the provision for refreshment, rest and recreation, in the building of day nurseries and in straightening out some of the personal problems connected with billeting.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of the Supplement this week is a lawyer belonging to the younger generation. I quoted a paragraph from the letter in C. N.-L. No. 24. The experiences through which we have passed in the weeks since it first reached me make what the writer says even more relevant to our situation, and recent contributions to the News-Letter may have helped to prepare our minds to understand the things which he wants to bring home to us.

Yours sincerely,

P. H. De la Haye

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EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO SOCIAL CHANGE

Dear Dr. Oldham,—

You will easily guess that I have been following the Christian News-Letter with the greatest interest. In case they may be of use to you, I have endeavoured to set down as shortly as I can some of the thoughts which have been passing through my mind in the last few months bearing on subjects with which you and your contributors have dealt. Their sources are various and would in most cases be difficult for me to identify, so I have not attempted to do so. Some of them you will recognise as reflected back from the News-Letter itself. I take it that this does not matter. On the contrary, it may serve to emphasise one of the things I specially like about the News-Letter. I mean the impression it gives of a sober effort to build up and maintain a common stock of thought rather than to startle with a series of sparkling individual contributions—like a commonwealth of the spirit, in which there is no copyright.

POWERLESSNESS OF IDEAS

First, however, let me say what it is more than anything else that dashes my hopes of the effectiveness of this effort, and tends to damp down any rising enthusiasm. I doubt its having any lasting effect, because I am compelled to doubt the effectiveness of *any* appeal to reason in this present age. Something has happened either to the minds of men or to the thoughts which fill them. These have grown somehow *thinner*. There is no faith in ideas and in their compelling power comparable to that which ruled in the Nineteenth Century. The controversies between Huxley and Wilberforce, between Newman and Kingsley, were, I am con-

vinced, real destiny-involving issues not only for the protagonists themselves, but for tens of thousands who followed them, in a way which no controversy about ideas ever is to-day. Whether there is simply too much newsprint about, or systematic propaganda has poisoned the wells, or whatever the cause may be, the average man of to-day does not arrive at his convictions dialectically. He has lost faith in ideas. When he has followed some chain of thought to its logical conclusion and given his assent, he will turn to another page of his newspaper and read, without dissent, the exact opposite. The mind of the German nation as it listened to Goebbels and Ribbentrop, first before and then after the Russo-German Pact, is only an extreme instance of this. It is not the startling exception we should like to think it.

AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD

I start off with this because "if way to a better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst." And this for me is the worst obstacle to the effectiveness of the Christian News-Letter and indeed to the success of any positive effort to produce something good out of the mental and physical chaos by which we are surrounded and threatened. It is a factor of which I am again and again being made freshly aware and it should, to my mind, be the determining factor to-day in considering the first problem which confronts anyone who seeks to exert a healthful influence on the minds of a large number of people; that is, the problem of a method. I have a suggestion, perhaps rather vague, to make towards the solution of this problem, which I will put as shortly as I can.

I must lead up to it indirectly. If you

are convinced that it is well for a man, or it may be a nation, to make something, there are two possible ways of imparting that conviction to him. You may convince him by argument that such a thing, if made, would be a good and useful thing. That is one way. On the other hand you may say: "This thing already exists potentially and is merely waiting to be brought into visible being. Moreover it is your true nature to make it, because its archetype already exists in you. If you fail to make it you will be acting in a way that is fundamentally false: you will be a sort of hypocrite."

Now I believe that this second method is the only one which has any chance of success to-day. I also believe that it is inherently a better method, because for one thing it is in harmony with religious faith. Ethics are concerned with what ought to be, where religion is concerned solely with what is. It is, for instance, not a religious appeal to say "You ought not to be acquisitive," whether or no we add "because in that way peace will be secured." It is a religious appeal to say: "It is the will of God that you should not be acquisitive," whether or no we add "and you will find that it is really your own will also, the will of that true self of yours for whose salvation Christ died."

The question is, therefore, is there any chance of producing by this second method a widespread conviction in the minds of English people that it is their urgent business to create a new society? In attempting to answer this question one naturally asks first, whether the attempt has ever been made before.

AN EARLIER ATTEMPT

A century ago a great man was writing in this country on social and political questions with an aim not unlike that of the Christian News-Letter. Coleridge saw that a new society was needed in Europe and that it could only be brought about by a change in people's ways of thought and feeling. He virtually foresaw, as the inevitable result of habits of thought which were then comparatively new but were rapidly becoming prevalent, the very disintegration which we are now experiencing. I do not wish to expound his doctrine, only to stress the fact that he chose the second method of appeal.

He tried to familiarise English people with the notion that there is what he called the "idea" of a nation, a constitution, a church—that is, not a theory of these things worked out empirically, but something which they are in fact and in the nature of things striving to be; and that the first problem is to *recognise* this "idea" in each case. He failed to "get it across" because the terms in which he was obliged to expound his thought do not come easily to English people, being indeed terms for which their very language is ill adapted, compared, for instance, with the German tongue. In order to succeed he would have had first to induce in others his own philosophic intimacy with a world of the unmanifest, of the "becoming." This was the labour of Hercules which he set himself in "The Friend," "Church and State," and others of his prose writings, but it was beyond his, probably beyond any man's, powers and he never won more than a small audience. The failure was disastrous because for anyone who will first take the trouble to master Coleridge's system of thought these writings of his contain a depth of Christian political wisdom which I believe to be unsurpassed by any other English, possibly by any other, thinker.

Is there any better prospect of success to-day? I believe there may be. There is one respect in which the mental background of Europe to-day differs quite startlingly from the background of a hundred years ago. Practically everyone has become acquainted with the notion of an "unconscious." Since the turn of the century people have gradually acquired the habit of referring in the most matter of fact, even glib, way to this particular aspect of the "unmanifest." To this extent we are all accustomed to "moving about in worlds not realised" without any of those "blank misgivings" which Wordsworth mentioned and Coleridge failed to dispel. This one fact seems to me to create a totally different situation, so that, if Coleridge were here to-day, he would find exactly what he formerly lacked, a point of contact with the minds of his contemporaries from which at least to make a start.

INDIVIDUALISM OUR HERITAGE

Am I making my suggestion at all clear ? What I want to get at is that the true form of the society which Britain ought to create already exists potentially in the nation's unconscious, and that the appeal most likely to succeed is an appeal which proceeds on that basis, recognising and describing rather than exhorting, declaring the nature of man rather than defining his rights and obligations.

For example, most people agree that one of the main issues at stake in the present war is the principle of individualism—of freedom. It is the obscure feeling that *this* is in jeopardy which has so far united the nation in a practical harmony in spite of all minor discords. Now it is very important, if the discords are not to grow and destroy the harmony, that that obscure feeling should be transformed into a clear consciousness and a firm conviction. But suppose, according to the first method, one merely affirms that man ought to be free, or has a right to be free, or that individualism is the ultimate aim, the discords begin to sound at once. Look what your individualism leads to—the Black Country, South Wales, malnutrition for millions while a few thousands live in comfort! Sir Richard Acland has put it all cogently in his *Unser Kampf*.

Coleridge would have forestalled such criticism. For he would have begun by looking for the “idea” of individualism embedded in and disguised by its partial and accidental manifestations; he might perhaps have found it in the fact that each individual man is made in the image of God. Is it not possible by a different style of exposition to adapt this method of thought to the consciousness of to-day ? Would it be so difficult to bring the English people to see that the *impulse* to individualism has been throughout their history, and is now, implanted in their unconscious; and that precisely because its true nature has remained hidden from them, the outward expressions which that impulse has found from time to time, the vessels into which it has been poured, have been too much determined by the accidents of its environment ? A plant for the same reason may

be made to grow into all manner of ugly and stunted shapes ; but the fact that it must grow awry rather than cease growing altogether proves nothing about the plant, except that it is strong.

The predominantly economic interests of Britain at the beginning of the present industrial age were the latest environment in which this strong impulse to individualism had to grow as best it could. The misshapen growth is a token of its strength. The significant thing about the Factory Acts is not that wicked men opposed them, but that good men did. So strong and fundamental is this impulse that it has thriven in the most unlikely places rather than in no place at all. If it finds no better environment than the shop, then at least it exerts itself to produce a nation of shopkeepers instead of a national chain store, and it does this in spite of all the advantages which the chain store can show from other points of view.

IMPULSE AND THE FUTURE

It is the peculiarity of our age (the powers of evil know it well) that it is possessed with a desire to become more conscious of the nature of such fundamental and hitherto unconscious impulses. An impulse is the future playing into the present; it is the unmanifest seeking manifestation, the “idea” beginning to realise itself. For every one person who knows what an “entelechy” is, there are a hundred thousand who dimly feel its reality in their own spiritual background. This, I believe, is the principal reason for that thinness of lucid but theoretical thinking which I mentioned earlier. Men feel that the impulses, less conscious as yet, are more real. Hence the popularity of, for instance, D. H. Lawrence.

The thing that operates more powerfully than anything else to bring unconscious impulses up to the level of consciousness is the manifestation of their opposites. And in the last few years the outstanding phenomenon in Europe has been precisely the opposite of individualism. Collectivism abroad, erected into an idol and run mad, has not merely shocked the British people, it has partially stunned them. They are, I believe, almost electrically ready to be made aware of their impulse to individualism, aware of it as never before, not in its too sorry mani-

festations but in its own true nature as an impulse, in its deep, deep roots.

THE TRUE SPHERE OF INDIVIDUALISM

If this could be brought about, I believe that three-quarters of the battle on this ground would be won. The light would break very quickly as the impulse revealed itself in its true nature. We should see that the economic life of a community is *not* the part of its life in which individualism can find expression. That part cannot express individualism and remain human. It is essentially collective. The true vehicle for the impulse to individualism is men's spiritual life. That part cannot *fail* to express individualism and remain human. We should see that man must be free, not because he is a trader, but because he is a spirit; he must be an individual because God speaks to and through the individual, and for no other reason. "His claim to freedom," as you yourself wrote on June the 26th, "rests in the last resort on his relation to God." Nor is such freedom a necessity for his individual moral well-being only. It is also necessary for the growth and development of society. For the forms of society are the products of creative thought and moral imagination; and these are functions of the individual human spirit in its sacramental relation to the Holy Spirit. When St. Joan, in Shaw's play, retorts to the sceptic who has attributed her voices to her imagination, "Why, of course, that is how the messages of God come to us!" she puts the true case for political freedom in a dozen words.

Without a clearer understanding of this case and the conviction that comes of understanding, individualism will not win and will not deserve to. Collectivism will trample it down. The demonic powers which begin to work in collectivism the moment it is mis-transferred from the economic to the spiritual life of mankind, simply laugh at Wellsian claptrap about

the sacredness of personality, as the witches laughed at Macbeth while he was still innocent of anything worse than self-centred ambition. They know how hollow it is, and where it leads to, and how perfectly it plays into their hands.

I give this as an example only, and perhaps it is the most important example for us. But the principle applies equally elsewhere. There is also a deep impulse towards collectivism in the British people, the inventors of clubs, trade unions and friendly societies. If they could be brought to recognise this impulse in its own nature, for what it is, they could ride on it towards a new form of society. Whereas, if you set up any of these things, individualism, collectivism, democracy, as an abstract ideal, it becomes, if the impulse is strong enough, an idol, and if it is not, mere talk.

If you ask me for detailed and practical suggestions based on what I have said, I confess I am still at a loss. To substitute for argument and exhortation the semi-magical influence of slogans, repetition, and psychological tricks is to exploit the unconscious, not to enlighten it. Possibly the effect of a short and really powerful declaration or manifesto (the product perhaps of that "commonwealth of the spirit" which is your vineyard) would lie somewhere between the two extremes of dialectic and suggestion. I do not know. And there is certainly much more than this to be done. But does not the startling success in our time of the devices to which I have just referred well illustrate how much an able adaptation of method to the contemporary mental background can do in one direction—the wrong one? I feel so sure that, if as much is ever done and in as short a time, in the right direction, it will be done by those whose eyes are at least as wide open to the actual nature of that background as are the eyes of the adversary himself.

Yours sincerely,

OWEN BARFIELD.

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